United Nations A/58/365–S/2003/888

# General Assembly
# Security Council

Distr.: General
12 September 2003

Original: English

**General Assembly**
**Fifty-eighth session**
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
**Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization**

**Security Council**
**Fifty-eighth year**

## Interim report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict**

*Summary*

The present report is prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 55/281 of 1 August 2001, by which the Assembly calls upon Governments, regional and subregional organizations, as well as relevant civil society actors to consider the report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985-S/2001/574 and Corr.1).

The report provides an analytical overview of United Nations efforts in the field of prevention. It shows that the United Nations system has recently launched a number of efforts to assist Member States in building their capacity for the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes and for building sustainable peace and development. It has also undertaken initial efforts to strengthen its own capacity for providing such assistance. The report notes that while some initial progress has been made in improving the capacity of the Organization, this is not enough. The United Nations is only at the beginning of a fundamental process of mobilization and of building partnerships. In his comprehensive report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, the Secretary-General intends to present recommendations on how to strengthen further the capacity of the Organization in order to ensure that conflict prevention is made the cornerstone of the collective security system of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.

* A/58/150.

** The late submission of the report is due to delay in obtaining necessary comments and input from United Nations entities.

03-50050 (E) 061003

# I. Introduction

1. The present report is prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 55/281 of 1 August 2001, by which the Assembly calls upon Governments, regional and subregional organizations, as well as relevant civil society actors to consider the report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985-S/2001/574 and Corr.1). In paragraph 3 of the resolution, the Assembly calls upon all relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to consider, in accordance with their mandates, the recommendations addressed to them and to inform the Assembly of their views in this regard. In his letter to me dated 29 April 2002 (A/56/935), the President of the Assembly also asked me to submit a report to the Assembly "setting out, in consolidated form, any views submitted by the aforementioned organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system pursuant to paragraph 3 of resolution 55/281 ...".

2. On 15 May 2002, I sent a letter to the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system requesting them to inform me of the actions taken and/or contemplated by them to implement the recommendations and proposals contained in my report (A/55/985-S/2001/574 and Corr.1). My first report to the General Assembly on the responses received was issued on 5 November 2002 (A/57/588-S/2002/1269). In February 2003 the responses were distributed in full to the delegations participating in the open-ended consultations on the draft resolution on the prevention of armed conflict, chaired by the President of the General Assembly. In addition, chapter II of the present report contains a consolidated analysis of the replies received.

3. On 3 July 2003, the General Assembly adopted by consensus its resolution 57/337 on prevention of armed conflict. In paragraph 14 of the resolution, the Assembly requests that I submit, by the fifty-ninth session of the Assembly, a comprehensive report on the implementation of the resolution, taking into account the views expressed by Member States and the organs, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system in accordance with resolution 55/281. I will submit that report to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The present report, however, is an interim report and fulfils the reporting requirements of earlier resolutions 55/281 and 56/512.

4. Armed conflicts remain the primary source of instability in today's world and the primary concern of the United Nations. The main responsibility for prevention lies with Governments rather than with the international community. However, the United Nations system has increasingly been called upon to work with Member States to develop an integrated response to the threat of armed conflicts. Bearing in mind that the majority of the world's conflicts today take place within States rather than between them, the United Nations system has recently launched a number of efforts to assist Member States in building their capacity for the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes and for building sustainable peace and development. It has also undertaken initial efforts to strengthen its own capacity for providing such assistance.

5. In the present report, I provide an analytical overview of the recent experience of the United Nations system in strengthening its capacity-building for the prevention of armed conflict, with the goal of helping Member States develop their own views on the best path to translate the consensus that emerged from the process that led to resolution 57/337. In particular, I have outlined in the next chapters a

number of initiatives that the United Nations system has begun to take, in collaboration with its relevant partners, to assist Member States in building their capacity for preventing armed conflict, as well as the challenges that the United Nations system faces in promoting greater coherence and coordination in United Nations efforts in the field of prevention, both at the national, regional and international levels. I intend to report more systematically on the outcomes and progress of my ongoing efforts to strengthen the Organization's prevention capacity in my 2004 comprehensive report to the General Assembly.

## II. The state of our institutional responses

6. My report on prevention of armed conflict (A/55/985-S/2001/574 and Corr.1) differentiates between *operational prevention*, undertaken when violence appears imminent, and relating largely to the realm of diplomacy, and *structural prevention*, which implies addressing the root causes of potential armed conflict. The United Nations has a tradition of directly addressing operational prevention through preventive diplomacy. That is why present efforts centre on how to move forward on the implementation of a *structural prevention strategy* — one that would address the political, social, cultural, economic, environmental and other structural causes that often underlie the immediate symptoms of armed conflicts. That approach may be relevant when considering threats to peace and security such as terrorism. Adopting that broader approach to collective security will bring the United Nations back to its roots and strengthen the Organization's role in "the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations ..." (Article 55 of the Charter of the United Nations).

7. Since 1998, many new components of our prevention system have enhanced United Nations efforts towards the prevention of armed conflict. The United Nations system as a whole has started to consider the mandates of its agencies, funds and programmes through a prevention lens. That institutional change was well manifested in a survey I conducted in response to resolution 55/281.

8. In response to my letter of 15 May 2002 to United Nations organs, organizations and bodies, 27 entities submitted their views in regard to implementation of the recommendations contained in my 2001 report on the prevention of armed conflict. The results of the responses indicate four complementary trends:

(a) Most of the United Nations system has accepted conflict prevention as a key activity that has been increasingly integrated into its traditional mandates or functions;

(b) As most of our agencies or departments work in the field, there is an increasing capacity to move forward at the country level and to mobilize the United Nations system in a coordinated fashion;

(c) There is also an increasing willingness within the United Nations system to develop integrated strategies on conflict prevention and peace-building cooperation between the field and headquarters;

(d) There is also a trend to move towards multidimensional and long-term approaches to conflict prevention, building systematic linkages between

developmental and political conflict prevention activities of the United Nations system.

9. The review of the existing capacity of the United Nations system undertaken in preparation of the present report shows that the system has begun actively to mobilize its resources in order to adapt and respond to the new challenges to international peace and security. The major institutional instruments of the inter-agency prevention system that has been applied by the Organization for five years are assessed below.

**Coordination and coherence of United Nations activities**

10. Within the United Nations system, the role of individual agencies and programmes in the prevention of armed conflicts varies from country to country, depending on whether there is potential for an armed conflict of a cross-border nature or a conflict within a State, and on whether there is potential for the recurrence of an armed conflict. Progress in devising an integrated approach to the prevention of armed conflict was made possible by the active involvement of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which discussed conflict prevention at its fall 2002 meeting. CEB concluded that the conflict prevention and development agendas should be mutually reinforcing. The imperative to move from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention should be seen in that perspective. An effective system-wide strategy should draw systematically on both the early warning capabilities and its extensive field-based operational experience. The Board also concluded that while typologies of lessons learned are useful in building a more systematic capacity for conflict prevention, the United Nations system must appreciate that each case presents unique, specific features that will need to be analysed and acted on in their own right. Recognizing the diversity of experiences and the fact that each agency, programme and fund has a different mandate, governing structure and comparative advantage both globally and on the ground, several endeavours are currently under way to engage the whole system in efforts to implement my report.

11. Consultations on early warning and prevention take place within the specially constituted Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination, which includes 14 departments, programmes and agencies. The overall goal of the Framework process is to work with Member Sates in order to produce a swift and integrated United Nations system-wide response in the form of a comprehensive preventive action strategy. The Framework Team typically tackles situations where a broad-based, multisectoral response is warranted and where there is not already a strong United Nations involvement on the ground or in the headquarters. With the support of headquarters, United Nations country teams and regional offices are key actors for nominating countries for a review as well as formulating and implementing actions jointly agreed upon. The sharing of information and exchange of views help the participating departments and agencies to identify priorities and actions and provide an opportunity for cooperation and, when appropriate, to create an enabling environment for mutually agreed and country-driven mechanisms for coordination as well as the comprehensive approach necessary in complex situations. So far, the Framework Team has addressed mostly operational prevention cases, or "late" prevention cases, when more immediate, short-term steps are needed. It should now make additional efforts to look at potential conflict cases earlier on and to develop more systematic responses to emerging threats.

**Capacity-building**

12. The responses of the United Nations system are predicated on the belief, shared with many Member States, that the peaceful settlement of disputes is a key element of the day-to-day responsibility of Governments, civil society and other national stakeholders. In other words, efforts by a Member State to acquire capacity in that regard should be seen as a part of a systematic effort to obtain sustainable development by strengthening social cohesion and not necessarily as marking the onset of a crisis. In recent months the United Nations system has been working closely with national stakeholders, who are taking bold steps to enhance the capacity for ensuring sustainable peace and development, in a number of countries, including Guyana, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Gambia, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria and Fiji. In addition, the United Nations is assisting the Governments of Nigeria and Cameroon in the peaceful settlement of border issues. Much more needs to be done, however. For instance, efforts by national stakeholders in Côte d'Ivoire to acquire such capacity through the Forum on National Reconciliation in 2001 did not receive timely international support and the subsequent civil conflict was followed by a costly peace-building effort.

13. In particular, the United Nations has provided capacity-building assistance in the following areas:

(a) Strengthening the rule of law, including respect for human rights;

(b) Strengthening the ability on the part of public institutions to analyse and identify the potential for conflict and to resolve disputes peacefully;

(c) Establishing processes for generating consensus and dialogue among key stakeholders — through both formal institutions as well as civic forums — on divisive national issues;

(d) Strengthening the ability of Governments and civil society to ensure the delivery of essential services for the most vulnerable elements in society, especially those adversely affected by natural disasters, violent tension, or the shocks of globalization;

(e) Ensuring participation by women, youth and minorities in key national processes;

(f) Building capacity for stopping the illicit trade in small arms and natural resources that often helps to inflame existing tensions;

(g) Building support for diversity and tolerance in media, popular culture and education.

**Development assistance**

14. New approaches and methodologies are being developed to ensure that development work is conceived and carried out through a "conflict prevention lens". In particular, efforts are currently under way for working with Governments to integrate a conflict prevention perspective into the analysis and the primary tools of development assistance. Prevention concerns have started to be included in the development planning process, specifically the Common Country Assessment (CCA)/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Guidelines, and a conflict prevention perspective is being introduced into the mandated

activities of the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies. CCAs/UNDAFs are perhaps the most appropriate mechanisms for integrating conflict prevention into development assistance, since they constitute both product and process. In addition to the CCA/UNDAF Guidelines, the United Nations Development Group has prepared a Guidance Note on ways and means to address conflict prevention. The Guidance Note will be a useful reference tool for resident coordinators and United Nations country teams. While the aim of the exercise will mainly be to allow the United Nations system to develop a more systematic approach to structural conflict prevention, recommendations for operational conflict prevention are not excluded.

15. A key challenge remains to ensure that CCAs, UNDAFs, Transition Plans, country appeals processes and other available United Nations tools address the root causes of conflict, including political, social, educational, cultural, economic, environmental and other structural causes. As United Nations country teams work with Governments to carry out their assessments and analysis and determine priority areas for United Nations interventions in countries, they must focus on activities that will help to defuse tensions and contribute directly to redressing the situation or at least prevent a further deterioration. Early warning and targeting priority areas for preventive action are essential to preventing conflict or a resurgence of conflict. In particular, destabilizing factors, such as the existence of displaced populations, arms and drugs trafficking and crime, need to be addressed, especially in post-conflict situations, in order to prevent resurgence.

16. The prevention of the recurrence of armed conflict is another issue of great concern. Increasingly, it is necessary to understand that the absence of war alone does not constitute peace. Sustainable development and good governance are essential elements in United Nations efforts to build peace. For that reason, a number of country teams have prepared United Nations transitional recovery strategies designed to address the root causes of conflict and minimize the likelihood of conflict recurring in the aftermath of war. In addition, the recent experience in Afghanistan, with the establishment of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, represented a noteworthy step in attempting to formalize integrated, ongoing support to the political, governance and peace-building process, while simultaneously responding to urgent humanitarian and recovery needs. While it is still too early to evaluate how successful that deliberate strategy to link recovery and reconstruction programmes to the political process has been, lessons will have to be learned from it and other attempts to address the structural causes of the armed conflict.

17. Another way to reinforce peace processes and to avert the re-emergence of violence is to create the conditions necessary for the safe and sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons. A major effort is currently under way with the concept of the "4 Rs": repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction. That programme, a partnership between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, aims at bridging the gap between war and peace and between relief and development.

**Human rights**

18. As the failure to protect human rights is often a root cause of conflict, the effective promotion and protection of human rights must be seen as a vital element of conflict prevention. Work is ongoing in many countries to help strengthen national capacity, both governmental and non-governmental, and to ensure that domestic institutions and processes are protective of human rights and able to respond peacefully and effectively to civil, cultural, economic, political and social grievances and abuses before they are transformed into the seeds of open conflict. To those ends, a system-wide effort is presently under way to strengthen national protection systems and United Nations human rights actions at the country level, working through United Nations country teams in order to facilitate transitional justice and reconciliation processes and ensure accountability. At the same time, more assistance is needed for States seeking to find law-based and rights-respectful responses to terrorism, states of emergency and emerging conflict. The Security Council, in its conflict prevention work, is increasingly, and rightly, benefiting from human rights briefings provided by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the special rapporteurs and independent experts of the Commission on Human Rights. Such exchanges should be continued and expanded in recognition of the permanent nexus between peace and human rights.

**Rule of law**

19. Among the root causes of conflicts are non-compliance with the rule of law as well as the absence of institutional and legal mechanisms to address grievances in a given society. Strengthening respect for the rule of law in international as well as in national affairs was fully endorsed by the General Assembly in its United Nations Millennium Declaration in September 2000 and constitutes one of the goals of the road map towards its implementation. In view of the consolidation and the advancement of the rule of law, in mid-2000 the Secretariat developed the *Strategy for an Era of Application of International Law: Action Plan*. It is directed towards promoting compliance by States with the international treaty framework, either by encouraging participation in multilateral treaties or by assisting States in preparing the necessary implementing legislation.

**Regional dimensions**

20. Efforts to bolster national prevention capacity are not always enough. The regional and subregional environment can make the difference between conflict management and conflict mismanagement. All too often, conflicts spill over from one country into another. Regional organizations are often best placed to prevent violent conflicts in their own neighbourhoods and can use a range of conflict prevention tools. For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations focuses on economic integration and "quiet dialogue", whereas the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe has been successful with confidence-building measures that focus on the question of minorities. The establishment of the United Nations Office for West Africa should also contribute to a more systematic and integrated approach to the problems of the region. In addition, the United Nations is continuing its efforts to enhance the capacity of regional organizations for the prevention of armed conflict. Institutional arrangements at the headquarters level and in subregions should be geared towards supporting collaborative and comprehensive conflict prevention mechanisms.

21. The emphasis on regional approaches to conflict prevention has also been translated into renewed efforts to increase the cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. The last two high-level meetings with heads of regional organizations, held in 1998 and 2001, concentrated on conflict prevention and peace-building. At my suggestion, the Fifth High-level Meeting between the United Nations and Regional Organizations, held on 29 and 30 July 2003, focused on "New Challenges to International Peace and Security, Including International Terrorism". The meeting strongly endorsed international cooperation in the prevention of armed conflict as a fundamental element in countering challenges to international peace and security. It also asserted the importance of multilateralism in addressing the problem of terrorism in a manner that does not further heighten tensions between communities and States, or lead to further violations of human rights. In the light of the new global and regional threats to international peace and security, the heads of regional and international organizations present in the meeting decided to meet more frequently, preferably annually.

22. In addition, the Organization is presently developing regional prevention strategies with regional partners and appropriate United Nations organs and agencies. The most advanced of those strategies are the one in West Africa, more specifically in the Mano River Union countries, which guides the actions of the recently established office of my Special Representative for West Africa, and the one in Central Asia, following my visit to the region in October 2002. The strategies aim to identify the gravest threats, cross-border reactions, the likelihood of chain reactions, the diplomatic initiatives currently under way, possible new approaches and partnerships with other actors, and to recommend steps for action.

**Role of women**

23. The United Nations system is increasingly recognizing the need to prioritize the positive and proactive role that women can play in ensuring lasting peace in crisis situations. United Nations agencies are engaged in supporting legal and constitutional reforms that promote the role of women and in working with governmental and civil society organizations to support the role of women in peace-building in places such as Rwanda and Afghanistan. Additional efforts will need to be made to ensure the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

**Preventive action and terrorism**

24. Although there is disagreement on the relation between terrorism and a possible number of enabling factors, early action may be useful to help dissuade groups from embracing terrorism and to deny possibilities for terrorists to take action. Structural prevention, in particular, may help provide an early response to developing conflicts. Managing conflicts in a way that prevents them from becoming entrenched could remove sources that terrorists point to as causes to justify their action. The Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism proposed a tripartite strategy to guide the United Nations system in its efforts against terrorism (see A/57/273-S/2002/875). The strategy includes prevention as one of its key elements. Efforts to implement it are currently under way.

**Disarmament**

25. The links between disarmament and the prevention of armed conflict are easy to understand. Instruments such as the Chemical Weapons Convention contain specific provisions relevant to conflict prevention, including in relation to consultations, confidence-building measures and the peaceful resolution of disputes. The role that disarmament and arms control treaties play in creating international norms which shape the behaviour of States, groups and individuals, as well as the importance of non-proliferation measures in creating a climate of prevention must be considered as an integral part of the matrix of solutions. Such measures are increasingly relevant as the issue of non-proliferation returns to the top of the international security agenda.

**Role of major organs**

26. The importance of efforts to integrate peace and development was recognized by the recent establishment of the Security Council Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa. In its recent meetings on the situation in Africa, the Security Council reaffirmed the importance of strengthening its cooperation through greater interaction with the Economic and Social Council. Stronger cooperation between the two organs is essential to ensuring a smooth transition from conflict resolution to peace-building in countries emerging from conflict. The Economic and Social Council is increasingly being recognized as a contributor to the effective implementation of conflict prevention and peace-building strategies.

**International financial institutions**

27. The Bretton Woods institutions, through their own diverse array of instruments, can add significant value to the United Nations system's collective efforts to prevent violent conflicts. Efforts are currently being made to increase cooperation and dialogue with international financial institutions in the area of prevention, in particular through CEB. Such efforts are based on the premise that development alone is not a guarantee against conflicts and the activities of the international financial institutions aimed at promoting economic growth and development per se are not enough to prevent violent conflicts. Strategic programme interventions and advocacy efforts should focus on addressing the root causes of violent conflict, such as inequitable access to resources and opportunities, to create an enabling environment for peace-building and conflict prevention. The analytical capacity of the United Nations system to address the impact of macroeconomic and fiscal issues on the dynamics of armed conflict should be strengthened.

28. The World Bank has the potential to complement, in a significant way, the United Nations system's efforts to prevent violent conflicts. Recently, it has recognized prevention as central to its mission of eliminating poverty and reaching the Millennium Development Goals. The Bank has also broadened its response from a focus on providing financial capital and rebuilding physical infrastructure to a comprehensive approach including initiatives to support the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, the social and economic reintegration of displaced populations, the promotion of good governance through legal reform and capacity-building, and the alignment of transparent public expenditures. It has also substantively developed its analytical capacity in order to increase its understanding

of the root causes of conflict and post-conflict recovery, as well as of the environmental causes and consequences of conflicts. Its initiative to address development priorities of lower-income countries under stress is also an important contribution to the United Nations system's efforts in the area of peace and security. Finally, the Bank is putting increased emphasis on partnerships in supporting war-to-peace transitions, in particular with the United Nations system. Progress has also been made in improving collaboration between the United Nations system and the International Monetary Fund, including in specific country cases. That cooperation should be developed further. I intend to consider appropriate mechanisms to allow the Bretton Woods institutions to complement and support further other partners in the United Nations system — mechanisms which should be simple, country-driven and of an operational nature.

**Civil society**

29. Civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be further encouraged to join the United Nations in developing and implementing conflict prevention and recovery strategies and to ensure that their own mandates focus on the prevention of armed conflicts. The United Nations system is presently assisting the initiative to organize, in 2005, an international conference of local, national and international NGOs on their role in conflict prevention and future interaction with United Nations in that field, as stated in Recommendation 27 of my report (A/55/985-S/2001/574). In urging the NGO community to review carefully its potential in the prevention of armed conflict, I explicitly recognized the valuable role that civil society can play when organized for better cooperation with Member States and the United Nations system. In many instances, in tackling the potential conflicts of today, civil society might be best positioned to initiate prevention or warn about dangerous local developments or spillover potential across national borders. While we have not yet fully harnessed how United Nations — civil society cooperation and cross-fertilization work, we cannot ignore that growing field and should fully utilize its potential for our work.

**Private sector**

30. There is now increasing awareness of the significance of the role of the private sector. However, while the United Nations generally recognizes that the international private sector can be a powerful player in situations of conflict, the understanding of the precise motivations and interests of the international corporate sector in such situations is still limited. Recently, progress was made in that area in the context of the Global Compact Initiative, which I launched in 1999. The Global Compact Office has promoted a policy dialogue series on the role of the private sector in zones of conflict, bringing together business actors, major NGOs, as well as United Nations departments and agencies. Those dialogues have focused on transparency, conflict impact and assessment, multistakeholder partnership initiatives and revenue-sharing regimes. Some of the products developed through those dialogues, such as the "impact assessment tool", are currently being tested by individual companies and regional workshops are being held to improve upon them. Others, such as a shared understanding on transparency, are being further developed and have great potential to change policies and behaviour. A third category of outcomes, such as good models on multistakeholder cooperation, serve as good practices on how business and other actors can make positive contributions. Further

efforts should be made to encourage the private sector to embrace and enact good practices in conflict areas.

**Training**

31. The United Nations Conflict Prevention Training Programme, launched by the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations System Staff College, in cooperation with other United Nations departments, programmes and agencies, has provided a United Nations system-wide training programme for over 1,200 Organization staff. The programme has contributed to strengthening the culture of prevention among Organization officials in a significant way. In particular, it has provided a framework for the creation of a common language on the prevention of armed conflict among Organization staff through interaction and the exchange of experience. It has also offered a framework to conduct comprehensive risk analysis on different hypothetical situations and to discuss alternative responses by the United Nations system. Consideration is presently being given to expanding the scope of the workshops to contribute to building national capacity on prevention in selected countries.

# III. The way forward

32. The review of some of the activities recently undertaken by the United Nations system in the field of the prevention of armed conflict suggests that some initial progress has been made in improving our capacity. However, this is not enough. We are only at the beginning of a fundamental process of mobilization and of building partnerships in order to ensure that conflict prevention is made the cornerstone of the collective security system of the Organization in the twenty-first century.

33. The key task for the United Nations system in the years to come is to agree on practical measures to integrate conflict prevention further into its activities, to build a more structured link between political and socio-economic strategies and to ensure that the prevention of armed conflicts becomes a deliberate component in the planning and coordination arrangements of development programmes. That would help to promote a more comprehensive approach to the prevention of armed conflict, addressing multiple factors in a coordinated fashion and contributing to meeting people's basic economic, social, cultural and humanitarian needs. Each agency, fund and programme, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions, is contributing different approaches which add value and should be built upon in pursuing greater system-wide synergies towards conflict prevention. What is needed therefore is greater coherence and coordination in United Nations efforts in the field of structural prevention at the national, regional and international levels.

34. In addressing those issues, the United Nations system is highly dependent on the political will of national Governments. It is the responsibility of Governments to avoid the risk of conflict through equitable public policies and adherence to the principles of international humanitarian and human rights standards. Sovereignty brings with it the fundamental responsibility to protect not only the physical security of citizens but also, as necessary, their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. International assistance for the prevention of armed conflict should not consist of the internationalization of specific issues within a particular country's borders, but rather of discreet support for building local capacity for the peaceful

settlement of disputes. In support of national Governments, the United Nations, regional organizations, NGOs, civil society and private sector entities each have a role to play.

35. In addition to the tasks that are already being undertaken and that were described in the previous chapter, I believe that the United Nations system will need to pay additional attention to the following three areas. First, it should strengthen its capacity to help coordinate the international efforts of all actors, within their mandates, such as States, international financial institutions, regional organizations, NGOs and the private sector, to carry out structural prevention strategies.

36. Secondly, further progress needs to be made in responding to the political economy of armed conflicts. The policy aspects of the issues surrounding resource-based intra-State conflicts and the economic agendas of civil war should be further explored. In addition, the United Nations system will need to devise appropriate instruments to ensure that war economies are addressed at all stages of the conflict, be it conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping or peace-building.

37. Lastly, in addressing the root causes of armed conflict, the United Nations system will need to devote greater attention to the potential threats posed by environmental problems. Within the system there is already an important body of experience in assisting in the development of cooperative arrangements among States for the management of resources shared by more than one State, such as water, thereby contributing to the general objective of preventing violent conflicts. However, the implications of the scarcity of certain natural resources, of the mismanagement or depletion of natural resources and of the unequal access to natural resources as potential causes of conflicts need to be more systematically addressed by the United Nations system. The United Nations system should consider ways to build additional capacity to analyse and address potential threats of conflicts emanating from international natural resource disparities.

## IV. Conclusion

38. **General Assembly resolution 57/337 gave me and the whole international community a strong signal that the Assembly is willing to support my efforts in the field of conflict prevention. We now have a unique opportunity to move forward. In my comprehensive report, to be submitted to the General Assembly next year, I will provide additional guidance on the steps that need to be taken to make conflict prevention a key function of the United Nations, as already foreseen in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations.**

39. **I invite all Member States, as well as the United Nations system and its partners, regional organizations, international financial institutions and civil society, to prepare for a substantial discussion on the way forward. I believe that resolution 57/337 represents a significant change in the policies and attitudes of States Members of the United Nations towards the recognition of the value of early warning and prevention of armed conflict. I am fully committed to that process of change as part of the reform of the Organization to meet fully the challenges of the twenty-first century.**